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AUTHOR Garrott, Carl L.
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ABSTRACT

A study of the social and/or ethnic attitudes within the college French classroom had the objectives of: (1) determining possible social influences; (2) examining attitudinal reactions to bipolar adjectives describing Francophones; and (3) examining the attitudinal reactions to varying degrees of social distance. The 228 subjects were students in twelve classes, four at each of three levels of study, at a major state university. The data consisted of student scores on two attitude inventories, one measuring semantic differential on twenty pairs of bipolar adjectives and the other the Bogardus Social Distance Scale measuring the degree of actual and desired social contact with persons from twenty nations or provinces. The instruments were administered just before final examinations. The results support previous research indicating that ethnic and social attitudes may include a tendency for a person to act in a way corresponding to his or her cognitive and affective combinations, and that the "occidental-good, non-occidental-bad" distinction continues to influence American students. Generally, the results suggest that culturally conditioned perceptions of reality stubbornly persist even after language study. French teachers should adopt techniques relating real attitudes, behaviors, and experiences to Francophones, and students must learn to tolerate ambiguities and differences. (MSE)

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SOCIAL STEREOTYPES, SOCIAL DISTANCE AND THE UNIVERSITY FRENCH STUDENT

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Carl L. Garrott
Division of Foreign Languages
CHOWAN COLLEGE
Murfreesboro, North Carolina

9 April 1985

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SOCIAL STEREOTYPES, SOCIAL DISTANCE

AND THE

UNIVERSITY FRENCH STUDENT

Introduction and Background

Basic to the assessment of ethnic and/or social stereotypes is its definition. Walter Lippmann (1922) originally popularized the term and suggested that stereotypes are factually incorrect, illogically and rigidly held images or labels. Katz and Braly (1933, 1935) later defined a stereotype as a fixed impression which conforms very little to the facts it tends to represent, and results from our defining first and observing second.

The first serious attempt to measure social and/or ethnic stereotypes was made by Katz and Braly (1933). The original investigation requested 25 students to list as many characteristics as they thought were typical of various ethnic groups. The list generated by the students was supplemented by additional terms identified by Katz and Braly. Next, the list of 84 terms was presented to 100 students, and these students were asked to select from this list of 84 terms those five terms typifying a specific ethnic group. Katz and Braly (1933) defined a group stereotype as the 12 terms most frequently selected by the 100 students.

Karlins, Coffman, and Walters (1969), in a follow-up study, compared their data on Princeton University students with Katz and Braly

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(1933) and a study of Princeton students by Gilbert (1951). The results indicated that ethnic stereotypes were relatively stable with some slight differences because of the changing social climate from 1931 to 1967. International conflict and changes in ethnic attitudes have also been investigated, and ethnic attitudes were again found to be relatively stable over time (Caplow and Bahr, 1979; Dudycha, 1942; Meenes, 1943; Seago, 1947).

The present investigation was designed to apply the semantic differential (Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum, 1957) and a revised Bogardus Social Distance Scale (Bogardus, 1925) to the measurement of social attitudes. The use of these two attitude instruments assumed a three-factor view of attitude formation stressing cognitive, affective and behavioral components (Triandis, 1971; Zimbardo and Ebbesen, 1970). The cognitive component included what people thought about, how people categorized and discriminated elements of the environment, and the language used to verbalize the elements of the environment (Chein, 1951; Triandis, 1971).

The affective component included the positive or negative feelings, pleasant or unpleasant states, or simply the way an individual evaluated objects in the environment (Chein, 1951; Triandis, 1971). The behavioral component reflected the positive and negative degree of social distance an individual put between himself or herself and the object (Triandis; 1971).

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The purpose of this study was to examine the social and/or ethnic attitudes within the foreign language classroom in order to: (1) determine possible social influences; (2)examine attitudinal reactions to bipolar adjectives describing Francophones; and (3) examine attitudinal reactions to varying degrees of social distance.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects (N=228) used in this investigation consisted of twelve classes (four at each of three levels of French study) randomly selected from a major state-supported university French department. The group at each level (French 101, 102/106, and 201) consisted of 76 students.

Materials

The research data consisted of the student scores on two attitude inventories.

Semantic differential. The semantic differential consisted of a set of twenty bipolar adjectives with each pair of adjectives separated by a seven-step scale; respondents indicated the extent to which they thought the concept was associated with a pair of adjectives by checking one of seven rating. The evaluative nature of the bipolar adjectives (positive or negative) followed the model in Cooke (1978), in Gardner, Wonnacott, and Taylor (1968), and in Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957). Adjective pairs were randomly reversed in polarity in an effort to control the response set. A high score indicated favorable attitudes toward Francophones. Coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was calculated by

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the SPSS Reliability procedure (Norusis, 1979) using the total sample (N=228). Coefficient alpha was .85 for the semantic differential.

A revised Bogardus Social Distance Scale. The Social Distance Scale was a metric of social distance upon which a respondent indicated his or her degree of actual and desired social contact with persons from twenty nations and/or provinces on a seven-step scale. Brazil, China, Cuba, France, Germany, Holland, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Pland, and the Soviet Union were items taken from the original Bogardus Social Distance Scale (Bogardus, 1925). Canada, another nation found on the original Social Distance Scale was represented by Québec and Ontario on the new scale. Six other nations and/or provinces were added to the new Social Distance Scale: four Francophonic regions (Haiti, Martinique, Sénégal, and Zaire) and two other nations (Iran and Nigeria). A high score was indicative of low social distance and was considered to be positive. Coefficient alpha was .80 for the revised Social Distance Scale (N=228).

Procedures

A semantic differential scale and the revised Bogardus Social Scale were administered to the subjects (N=228) one week before the final examination in the French courses (French 101, 102/106, and 201). Subjects were advised at the beginning of this investigation that their anonymity would be maintained and that they were in no way obligated to participate in the project.

The scores from the two attitude inventories were tested for polarity or extremity of attitudes by using a two-tailed t-test:

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$\frac{(\bar{X} - u)}{\sqrt{N/s}}$ with N - 1 degrees of freedom. Extremity was measured using the mean ($\bar{X}$) from the student scores and the deviant mean (u) = 4 in the aforementioned equation (Gardner, Wonnacott, and Taylor, 1968). The negative or positive magnitude of the t-statistic was used to rank items on the two attitude inventories.

Results

Mean, standard deviations, t-statistics, and ranks on a semantic differential and the revised Social Distance Scale scoring indices are presented in Tables 1 and 2 respectively. Table 1 indicated that the subjects (N=228) saw the Francophone as good, beautiful, interesting, ambitious, graceful, sociable, and clean. However, the subjects indicated that the Francophone was talkative, unusual, defensive, and excitable. These normative descriptions were consistent with research conducted by Gardner, Wonnacott, and Taylor (1968) who used a 39-item semantic differential to study the stereotypical views of 108 Anglophonic undergraduate students in Ontario. In the study by Gardner et al. (1968), the French Canadian was viewed as talkative, excitable, proud, religious, sensitive, and emotional.

Table 2 indicated the occidental orientation of the subjects: national and/or ethnic groups perceived as similar to the American ideal were rated more positive by the respondents. Indonesia, Nigeria, Sénégal, Haiti, and India were less favored nations. Nations associated with alternative political systems (Cuba) and conflictual relations

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(Iran) were considered the most socially distant. On the other hand, the Soviet Union, a nation with a social and a political system diametrically opposed to the U.S. was rated more favorably than anticipated. Evidently, the subjects conceived of the Soviet people and the Marxist-Lenist doctrine of their leaders as separate concepts. Hess and Torney (1967), Glenn (1970), and Targ (1970) discovered that children understood that it was possible to be tolerant and friendly toward people living under Communist regimes, and yet feel negatively toward the character of their leadership. Furthermore, there were six Francophonic regions listed on the Social Distance Scale: France, Haiti, Martinique, Québec, Sénégal, and Zaire. The ethnic and/or racial composition of these Francophonic areas clearly determined the degree of social distance. European (France) and North American (Québec) exemplars were rated more favorably than non-Western Francophonic regions. These findings suggested that the respondents inextricably viewed cultural and/or ethnic similarity as a determinant of positive ratings.

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TABLE 1
SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL

SCALE	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	RANK
Unsociable-Sociable	5.02	1.07	14.39**	8
Good-Bad	6.05	1.15	26.92**	1
Cruel-Kind	5.22	1.32	13.96**	9
Happy-Sad	4.55	1.52	5.46**	15
Arrogant-Humble	3.30	1.28	-8.24**	14
Beautiful-Ugly	5.22	1.19	15.44**	5
Clean-Dirty	5.03	1.41	11.03**	11
Awkward-Graceful	5.37	1.90	10.89**	12
Foolish-wise	4.89	1.28	10.50**	13
Strong-Weak	4.34	1.05	4.89**	16
Talkative-Quiet	2.82	1.38	19.91**	3
Insensitive-Sensitive	4.34	1.69	3.04**	18
Generous-Stingy	4.10	1.26	1.19	20
Passive-Active	4.32	1.14	4.24**	17
Excitable-Calm	2.25	1.20	-22.02**	2
Poor-Rich	4.28	1.83	2.31*	19
Unaspiring-Ambitious	5.03	1.14	13.64**	10
Usual-Unusual	2.96	0.96	-16.35**	4
Boring-Interesting	6.28	2.32	14.84**	6
Aggressive-Defensive	5.25	1.29	14.64**	7

*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

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TABLE 2
SOCIAL DISTANCE

REGION	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	RANK
BRAZIL	5.18	2.28	7.81**	6
CHINA	4.37	1.95	2.86**	11
CUBA	2.25	2.44	-10.83**	19
FRANCE	5.48	2.33	9.59**	3
HAITI	3.80	1.69	1.79	15
HOLLAND	5.03	2.54	6.12**	7
INDIA	4.20	1.90	1.59	14
INDONESIA	3.43	1.76	4.89**	18
IRAN	2.19	2.35	-11.63**	20
JAPAN	4.55	1.71	4.86**	9
MARTINIQUE	4.47	2.05	3.46**	10
MEXICO	4.28	2.87	1.47	13
ONTARIO	6.01	2.33	13.03**	1
POLAND	5.60	2.08	11.62**	2
QUEBEC	5.28	2.42	7.99**	5
NIGERIA	3.44	1.68	-5.03**	17
SENEGAL	3.62	1.79	-3.21**	16
SOVIET UNION	4.57	1.98	4.35**	8
WEST GERMANY	5.45	2.65	8.26**	4
Zaire	4.34	2.74	1.87	12

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

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Discussion

The results of this study support the belief of Chein (1951), Gardner, Wonnacott and Taylor (1968), Triandis (1971) and Zimbardo and Ebbesen (1970) that ethnic and social attitudes may include a tendency for a person to act in a way that corresponds to his or her cognitive and affective combinations. Various ethnic and social stereotypes did emerge from these combinations, that is, stereotypes that have become normative in Anglo-Americans when confronted with members of a Francophonic culture: demonstrativeness and excitability. Hanvey (1976) offers one plausible explanation for this stereotype, that is, the fantasy world of television and movies.

Another result of this study supports the research by Pike and Barrows (1979), Hess and Torney (1967), Caplow and Bahr (1979), Lambert and Klineberg (1967), Hicks and Beyer (1970) that the occidental-good, non-occidental bad distinction continues to influence American students, even after language study. It was interesting to note that perspective consciousness (Hanvey, 1976) had not been developed fully in the sample used in this investigation, that is, the recognition or awareness on the part of the sample that he or she has a view of the world that is not universally shared. The occidental-good paradigm may also derive from the reinforcemodel perpetuated by the school center, schools that hold the untenable assumption that North American and/or European cultures and conventions are superior to all non-Western cultures.

At any rate, French instructors have long claimed that language study gives the student a key to understanding people from other

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cultures through communicative competence and/or literary study. The results of this study suggest that culturally conditioned perceptions of reality stubbornly persist even after language study. It may be said that the sample in the investigation was not psychoculturally adaptive to all Francophonic peoples.

In order to acquire the intercultural skills necessary to minimize the limitations of uniculturalism, the teacher might relate real attitudes, behaviors and experiences to the Francophone. The presentation of cultural material in the text and from personal experiences should be empathetic, open-minded, nonjudgmental, and as noncritical as possible. Students should practice putting themselves in the place of the Francophone through role-playing. Students should also learn that culture is functional, an option allowing for satisfying needs. Furthermore, students should learn to tolerate differences and ambiguities that exist between cultures and ethnic groups. Only under the aforementioned cirucumstances could gains in positive, nonstereotypic views of the Francophone be attained.

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